

Caregiver Connection

April 2011

A monthly publication for Washington state foster and adoptive families and relative caregivers.
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Every day, great work is done every day by caregivers, social workers and many others to keep children out of harm's way.

The story below is a moving example of one set of caregivers who took in a child who, unfortunately, had not been kept out of harm's way. Once entrusted to their care they kept her safe, helped her heal and left a legacy of love and caring to inspire us all in this month.

Spirit of the angels

Her tribal name was Oots Nas – "Spirit of the Angels."

The story of her short life is bittersweet.

But it is symbolic of the goodness of the spirit that defines those who try to keep children safe from abuse and neglect.

At the center of the story is this little girl and the foster family that cared for her during her six months of life.

The foster family does not want to be identified. Like many, they believe what they did is not anything special.

But after reading this story, you might agree that what occurred truly is extraordinary. Foster parents sometimes tend to diminish what they do. There is no diminishing the remarkable events that occurred in this child's life.

Two months after she was born in early 2007, her young biological mom left home for the evening. Her biological dad had some friends over. Sometime during that evening, the little girl was assaulted.

No one ever blamed the father for the assault. But the child was hospitalized.

This is where the foster parents come in. They had been taking care of children for 12 years, specifically children with medical problems.

"Sometimes," the foster mom said, "we have to weigh whether we can take care of a child or not. When I heard this story, I knew immediately we had to help. We went right down to the hospital and got her."

So traumatized and terrorized by what had happened to her, Oots Nas would let no one but the foster mom touch her or hold her; and she would not let go. She found comfort only in her foster mom's arms. Any attempt to put anything heavy over her – like a blanket – simply did not work.

So for two months, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the foster mom held her. Lots of people came to help her out, but only she could hold and calm the little girl.

Finally, the healing power of unconditional love slowly began to work its magic. Others, including the foster dad, could hold her for very brief periods of time.

Through all this, the foster family had developed a close relationship with the biological parents. It would have been easy to blame, but that was not in the foster parents' nature. They knew the child was destined to go home and they worked with the biological parents to help make sure that happened.

Finally, the foster mom got a night out. When she returned, she found Oots Nas had developed a high fever. Very concerned, she took her to the hospital. She begged and pleaded with the hospital staff to run tests. They did not, saying it was only a fever and the child would be OK.



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Camp To Belong applications

Brothers and sisters separated from each other due to out of home care are eligible again this year to attend Camp To Belong Washington in Port Orchard in August.

This is a great opportunity for siblings to connect in a camp whose program is specifically designed to strengthen the sibling bond. More than 260 brothers and sisters have been reunited at this camp since 2006.



Left to right:
Viktoriya Keller,
Lidiya Polunets,
Annah Keller

The 2011 Camp To Belong Washington basics are:

- Campers are to be 8-18
- They can be in foster care, relative care, adopted, living with biological parents, or in a guardianship, as long as at least one of the siblings is separated from the others
- Camp dates are August 15-20 at Miracle Ranch in Port Orchard
- Transportation is provided for all campers in Eastern Washington
- There is no cost to campers or caregivers
- 100 campers will be selected. The primary criteria is quantity and quality of visits; how often do the siblings see each other and under what circumstances.
- The application deadline is April 21. Campers will be selected the next week.

To fill out an application, click on www.camptobelongwa.org
Questions? Contact Bob Partlow: bob.partlow@dshs.wa.gov

IN BRIEF

The impact of early adversity of children's development

THIRD IN THE SERIES



Caregiver Connection continues with the third of a four-part series on the science of early childhood development from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. This is very helpful information for foster parents and caregivers regarding issues they may encounter with infants and young children who are placed in their care.

This edition provides information on how events in early childhood affect development.

"What happens in early childhood can matter for a lifetime," according to the Center on the Developing Child." To successfully manage our society's future, we must recognize problems and address them before they get worse. In early childhood, research on the biology of stress shows how major adversity, such as extreme poverty, abuse, or neglect can weaken developing brain architecture and permanently set the body's stress response system on high alert. Science also shows that providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior and health.

Some factors in early adverse experiences:

- Early experiences influence the developing brain. From the prenatal period through the first years of life, the brain undergoes its most rapid development and early experiences determine whether its architecture is sturdy or fragile
- Chronic stress can be toxic to development
- Significant early adversity can lead to lifelong problems
- Early intervention can prevent the consequences of early adversity
- Stable, caring relationships are essential for healthy development.

Find much more information on this subject at <http://developingchild.harvard.edu>.

When her 104-degree temperature had not subsided in the morning, she returned to the hospital. This time, they ran tests. Oots Nas had spinal meningitis.

The next day, with all the important people in her life surrounding her with love – the foster family, the biological family and members of tribes with which she was affiliated – her life slipped away.

Her journey had ended.

But one more chapter was yet to be written.

Each of the tribes wanted to lay the child to rest. No one could decide where she should be. So the foster mother made a suggestion. 10 years earlier, the foster family had cared for a child who was dying of cancer. When he died, he was buried in the nearby cemetery. Why not bury Oots Nas next to him, she suggested. The tribes agreed.

And all agreed to have a ceremony to mark the extraordinary events of this child's life. In the tribal tradition, the highest honor is bestowed when someone being honored is wrapped in a blanket.

Standing in the middle of the Muckleshoot Tribal Center, in front of all who loved this child, the foster mom and dad were wrapped in a blanket.

There was, of course, no bringing back this spirit of the angels. We can only bring back the memories of love given and lives touched.

But during this month of child abuse prevention, when we think about all we do to keep kids safe, we can also be inspired by this story of one little girl and those who wrapped her in the safe embrace of a loving home.

And we can take solace in the sentiments of songwriter Sarah McLaughlan that in death, as in her life "In the arms of the angels, may she find some comfort there."

National autism awareness month

April is National Autism Awareness Month and April 10-16 is the Week of the Young Child; this year's theme is "Early Years Are Learning Years."

CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Disabilities (NCBDDD) has organized activities during National Autism Awareness Month in Atlanta and other cities across the country with our partners.

Check CDC's website, CDC's Facebook page and Twitter feed for information and updates throughout the month.

"Learn the Signs. Act Early." will include autism awareness messages in our Campaign Champion newsletter and Twitter feed.

See you in court

Caregivers are to receive notice about upcoming court hearings for children in their care. However, don't hesitate to ask your social worker to make sure you know the next scheduled date, as sometimes hearing dates are changed. Court hearings are important times to discuss the lives of children and caregivers have the most relevant, timely information.

If you can't attend, you can always write a "Caregivers Report To The Court" with your observations about the child and ask your social worker to provide it to the judge.



National sibling day

Camp To Belong is a good reminder that National Sibling Day is April 10, a day in which the founder of the day, Claudia Evart, lost two sisters to accidents. April 10 was the birthday of one of them.

It is a time to remember the value of sibling connections, how much brothers and sisters impact our lives.

It is important for social workers and caregivers to do all they can to keep siblings together and/or connected in each other's lives.

Here are some reasons brother and sister connections are so important:

- Sibling Relationships are the longest life relationships most of us will have
- Brothers and sisters share experiences of all kinds that no one else understands
- Siblings teach each other how to get along and relate with others in the world
- No one can replace a brother or sister; they are the people most like you
- Strengthening family ties provides a foundation for a child or youth to establish his/her identity.

FACT: More adults who were in foster care as children are searching – not for their parents, but actually for the brothers and sisters they were separated from. (National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency, Hunter College School of Social Work, New York City, NY)

Looking for ways to keep brothers and sisters connected? Here are some tips:

- Ensure at least twice-monthly visits/contacts occur
- Encourage communication – phone calls, e-mail, letters, birthday and holiday cards
- Get ideas from the kids themselves on how they can keep connected
- Stay connected with the caregivers for their brothers and sisters
- Keep contact information handy and encourage them to stay in touch
- Include brothers and sisters in events that are important in their siblings' lives
- Take pictures of the brothers and sisters when they are together and share them.
- Talk to the siblings' social workers for help if there are barriers to keeping the brothers and sisters connected
- Arrange for them to attend Camp To Belong Washington
- Have them join a club together or sign up for lessons or activities like swim lessons or Little League
- Plan events siblings might like to do together, going to the movies, the park, going out to eat, getting a haircut, plan a brothers or sisters day out
- When possible, keep the youth connected to extended family members who can support him/her
- Consider becoming licensed for a sibling group, to ensure brothers and sisters can be placed together

Make it a priority to work together to remove barriers to promote sibling connections.

Important numbers to know when you take care of children in out-of-home care

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

ON-GOING AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Under contracts with the state, three private agencies are working to build supports for you within the foster care community. Supports include hubs, support groups, and matching new foster parents with veteran foster parents. To get connected:

- If you live in Eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula down through Pacific County or from Thurston County to Clark County, call 1-888-794-1794.
- If you live in King County or any counties north of King County, call 206-605-0664.
- If you live in Pierce or Kitsap counties, call 253-473-9252.
- If you live in King County, the Friends of Youth CARE program provides short-term counseling, education and support to help you care for your most difficult children. 1-888-263-3457 or 206-915-0459.

Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE or www.parenttrust.org. The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington state. Last year, the Family Help Line received more than 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect: Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team (FIRST) 253-219-6782. Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

Mental Health Crisis Line Information: The crisis line telephone number for your county or region is available on the DSHS Mental Health Division website at: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/crisis.shtml>.

GENERAL FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

FPAWS: Foster Parent Association of Washington State is an all volunteer non-profit association. It is led by experienced caregivers who provide support and helpful services to all caregivers (foster, adoptive, and kinship) in Washington State. In addition, FPAWS advocates for caregivers with Washington's legislative officials, all levels of Children's Administration staff and other community service providers to enhance the child welfare system. Contact FPAWS at fpaws.org or 1-800-391-CARE (2273).

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: Foster Care Resource Network, 253-473-9252. Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

RESOURCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

Get connected to information on resources in your area by calling 211 – a toll free number.

Girl Scouts of Western Washington: Fostering a Future: MeccaYS@girlscouts.org

Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC):

<http://www.parenthelp123.org/resources/food-resources>

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>

Children's Administration Foster Parent Training Website – Trainings are open to all licensed foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and unlicensed caregivers. For information about foster parent and caregiver training, check out:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp>

CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION FOSTER CARE LISTSERV

Join the 2,200 people who have subscribed to the List Serve

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1> for updated information on resources for the work you do in caring for children.

Family Planning Services are designed to help avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancy and are available through your local Community Service Office (CSO). Each CSO has a full time Family Planning Nurse to help provide services to Medicaid eligible clients.

There is also a Family Planning hotline number 1-800-770-4334.



"We are family day" at Safeco



Don't forget that Sunday, May 8, is We Are Family Day at the Mariners' ballpark.

There will be discounted tickets, raffle prizes at the pre-game ceremony in Ellis Pavilion from 10 to 11, free T-shirts for all participants and the kids will get to run the bases as part of the pre-game parade.

It's Mother's Day, so why not enjoy it at the ballpark? This is the major event for Foster Care Month, celebrated nationally to honor all caregivers.

For more information: http://seattle.mariners.mlb.com/sea/ticketing/special_group.jsp?group=wearefamily

New car seat recommendations

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Highway Safety Administration have issued new guidelines for the use of child safety seats in vehicles. They have changed their recommendation for how long children should use rear facing car seats.

For more information: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42186101/ns/us_news/

Looking for dental care for your kids?

Check out this link from the Washington State Department of Health: <http://doh.wa.gov/cfh/oralhealth/findcare/default.htm>

